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ABSTRACT

When using outside sources in their writing, students must learn to balance efficiency with effectiveness. In other words, they must express themselves clearly and quickly, providing readers with enough explicit information to create a causal chain based on reasonable inferences. Yet they must guard against being overly explicit, boring their readers with too obvious causal connections. By using their own prior knowledge and experience to reshape the source material, writers can introduce new information and arouse the readers' interest. Students must realize that they can only fulfill their own intentions as writers by satisfying their readers' needs. (MM)

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Writing Based on Reading: Reading Based on Writing

Recent interest in integrating instruction in reading and writing has focused primarily on the similarities in the processes, both reading and writing now being recognized as constructive processes. Less attention has been paid to how the writing process is constrained when writers draw on outside textual materials as the primary source of information for their new texts and what the effect of this constraint is on their readers. Two issues which impinge directly on the writer-reader relationship in such a context are the level of prior knowledge assumed of the reader and the level of inferencing that can reasonably be expected by a reader attempting to make sense of a new text.

Beaugrande (1980, p. 101) has pointed out that previous experience is crucial in the processing of a text because its continuity and coherence can only derive from a combination of presented knowledge and prior knowledge. He says that without such interaction, processing would require an unmanageable number of alternatives to be considered. This type of interaction between the information presented in the text and the information possessed by the reader has been recognized as being important for some time now in the issue of reading comprehension (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971).

The new factor in the inter-relationship between reader and writer that must be considered when students are being taught to use outside texts as information sources for their writing activities is the effect of having both the writers and the readers familiar with the same source

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texts. In this type of inter-action, since the writer assumes that the reader, typically the teacher or a classmate, is familiar with the source, the writer may not realize the importance of specifying enough of the supporting evidence within the text to permit the text to function as an independent entity for a reader who may be unfamiliar with the source material. That is, a possible danger is that student writers may come to believe that they can assume that readers know everything that they as writers know, and that they can leave out crucial evidence or "jump around" in the course of presenting a position because they assume that the reader possesses the information necessary to follow the argument without that evidence having been presented logically in the form of a causal chain of underlying relationships.

Schank (1975, p. 241) has noted that the amount of inferencing required to represent the meaning of a paragraph will be precisely as much as will allow for the creation of a causal chain between the conceptualizations. In other words, the readers will be creating the relationships between the sentences, i.e. constructing macro-propositions (van Dijk, 1977) as they work their way through the text. Some of these macro-propositions will be derived from explicit relationships stated within the text, but others will have to be inferred by readers as they create the links of the causal chain. If student writers have been able to assume a perfect shared-knowledge base with readers, they may feel less constrained to provide the essential information underlying the causal chain in the text.

What has to be considered is how to make student writers sensitive to the appropriate amount of explicit information to be presented within

two possible contexts for their writing. In the first context, they can assume shared knowledge with their readers and they can then determine how much implicit knowledge can be expected. In the second context, when writers draw on outside sources that are not familiar to the reader, they must learn to present their text at the appropriate level of explicitness, a level clearly different from the shared-knowledge context.

This notion of appropriate level of explicitness leads to the next issue which must be considered in designing an appropriate reader-writer relationship and that issue is inferencing. Readers can infer information from texts because they already possess notions of the world and context within which the specific text appears. These understandings or representations of the way in which the world is organized have been called schemas by Bartlett (1968). For Bartlett, a schema is an integrated, organized representation of past behavior and experience which guides an individual in reconstructing previously encountered material. In other words, in the reader-writer relationship, the information incoming from the text will be related by the reader to some organized representation of past experience. The reader may add this new information to the existing structure in memory, alter the structure, or reconstruct it entirely. Van Dijk (1977) has proposed the notion of a frame which organizes knowledge about certain properties of objects, courses of events, and action which typically belong together. Knowledge that is part of the frame, i.e. the reader's world knowledge, therefore need not be explicitly stated in the text.

Inferencing levels, then, for writers drawing on readings as sources of information, can derive from two sources. One is the prior knowledge of the reader based on his worldly experience, i.e. from schemas or frames, and the other is the prior knowledge based on the reader's experience with the specific texts being used by the writer as sources of information. Particularly in the latter case the writer needs to be sensitive about the explicitness of information presented from the underlying textual sources. (Naturally, the amount of world knowledge that could be assumed by any group of readers for any particular text would also have to be carefully assessed.)

If the writer can assume that the reader knows the source material, then the writer must search for a way to add something new to the topic. Tasks, then, which require the student to draw on outside reading materials must be designed so that each writer can formulate a unique contribution. Some forms that such a contribution could take could be an analysis that links ideas or experiences together in a new way, or one that encourages the writer to integrate his or her own background into the source material and re-interpret either the writer's experience or the experiences depicted in the sources in a new way. From this unique perspective, the writer has an opportunity to introduce something original to the reader even if the reader previously has been familiar with the same sources as the writer. If the writer does not re-shape the source material in some such fashion, the text produced may be efficient, that is, easily read, but not very effective.

Beaugrande (1980, p. 21) has proposed the category of "design criteria" as one standard of textuality. The three design criteria that he postulates are efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness.

> The EFFICIENCY of a text results from its utilization in communication with the greatest returns for the least effort, so that PROCESSING EASE is promoted. The EFFECTIVENESS of the text depends upon its intensity of impact on text receivers, promoting PROCESSING DEPTH, and upon its contribution toward the producer's goal, constituting the RELEVANCE of text materials to steps in a plan. The APPROPRIATENESS of a text depends on the proportionality between the demands of a communicative situation and the degree to which standards of textuality are upheld (Beaugrande, 1980, p. 21). (Emphasis in original)

In other words, Beaugrande is pointing out that the information level presented in a piece of writing must be appropriate to serve the intentions of the writer. The efficiency of the text, i.e. the level of explicitness, the amount of inferencing required, the effort of the reader in processing the information should have an effect upon the reader that serves the purpose of the writer. The efficiency level should allow the reader to process the information with the least possible effort but not with so little effort that the reader is totally bored and not engaged with the topic at all. The danger with setting the efficiency level too high is that the reader may say, "I already know this," or even worse, "Who cares?" The criterion of effectiveness is necessary to complement the criterion of efficiency in order to point out the importance of creating an impact on the reader that will create conditions for attaining the writer's goal. Thus, the writer must balance the needs of the reader with the intention of the writer.

Examples of student writing illustrate how some of these concepts function. In the first writing sample, the student develops an insight based on reading two essays about two individuals' lives. The writer points out that the two individuals were manipulated into situations and felt obligated to perform in ways others expected of them. That insight is developed with specific examples from the texts. For readers familiar with the source texts, the piece of writing is very efficient to read, but also very boring. There is no attempt to relate the generalization to the author's experience or to that of the reader. There is no new information in this writing, no real intention on the part of the writer to involve the reader or to interest the reader. What we see here is a far too typical example of perfunctory writing, a demonstration of knowledge, not a discovery of knowledge or any new insight. On Beaugrande's scale, this would be an ineffective piece of writing.

Student Writing Sample 1.

> In the essays, both Ullmann [Liv Ullmann, Changing] and Rodriguez [Richard Rodriguez, "On Becoming a Chicano"] were indirectly manipulated into situations they did not choose to be in. Both felt obligated to perform in the way that was expected of them instead of making their own decisions and doing what they really wanted. At the end of a long day, Liv Ullmann did not feel she could relax and take a break, much as she may have liked to. Instead, she felt obligated to give an interview to the Swedish journalist so that it would not be reported that she had become "stuck up". It even reached the point where she didn't dare doze on the plane for fear the Times reporter would view her with her mouth open. It seems that Miss Ullmann had reached a stifling situation; her decisions were governed by the people around her. In the same way, Richard Rodriguez was forced into doing things he really didn't want to. For example, he felt that he must forsake his Chicano culture and language because all that he had known before was not considered relevant by others. Rodriguez felt that he was only technically the person he once considered himself to be--a Chicano. Long ago he had given up being a Chicano because of the cultural consequences and pressures he had had to face.

In the next student writing sample, the writer draws an implication from the experiences of the two individuals she has been reading about. From the descriptions of these individuals breaking away from their families, the writer recognizes that the families have also been changed, and that the families have learned to function without the individuals' participation. She then recognizes that a similar change has occurred between herself and her family, that each has begun to exist more independently and that just as the family excludes her from their shared experiences, so is she excluding them from her new life as a college student. This new insight becomes the focus of the reader's attention even if the reader is familiar with the source texts because it generalizes beyond the discrete experiences of these individuals and develops a new insight that the reader can examine from his/her own perspective. Thus the source texts are combined with the writer's personal experience to draw the reader's attention to a wider topic.

Student Writing Sample 2.

> Along with a loss of innocence people are often forced to break away from their families. Family ties usually decrease if one leaves home to pursue a career. Rodriguez [Richard Rodriguez, "On Becoming a Chicano"] noticed "uncles would laugh good-naturedly, but I detected scorn in their voices. For my grandmother, the least assimilated of my relations the changes in her grandson since entering school were especially troubling." He also reminisced of a family gathering in which he slipped away to read almost unconscious of the family reunion outside. For Ullmann [Liv Ullmann, Changing] her ambition included leaving her home and country, spending lonely holidays with people she barely knew. As in both cases the family learns to function without them. Ullmann recalls "Call Linn in Norway. She says she is busy watching television, so I could be brief." This came to me during Thanksgiving at home. Although the whole family shared in conversation I felt subtly excluded since I was no longer a part of all their recent events discussed and my family wasn't a part in my recent experiences. (emphasis added)

From these examples, it is possible to see that writers must consider the prior knowledge of their readers, both from world knowledge and familiarity with particular source texts, as they construct their own new texts. Readers must be presented with a level of explicitness which will allow them to create a causal chain through reasonable inferencing. But they must not be presented with a level of explicitness that will bore them and thwart the intention of the writer. Only by introducing new information to the reader and arousing the reader's interest can the writer complement the efficiency of text with the criterion of effectiveness. All writing must serve the purpose of the writer by stimulating an appropriate response on the part of the reader.

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